

Remember how I said you cannot read a poem as an autobiography; I require that you ask yourselves first what it is that are you feeling, how do you feel experiencing the poem, what does the poem have to say to you, what is the world of the poem, what is the function of the poem?—For those of you who are writers, ask yourselves how in fact the poet accomplishes feeling.

Sometimes the function of a poem can be to make you feel just about completely hopeless:

Joy is finding a pregnant roach and squashing it, not finding someone to hold, let go get off get back don't turn me on you black dog, how dare you care about me you ain't got no good sense cause i ain't shit you must be lower than that to care.

Get back fat black woman be a mother, grandmother strong thing but not a woman. Games woman romantic woman love needer, man seeker dick eater sweat getter, fuck needing love seeking woman.

(Silence)

Are you getting tired of feeling?

Do you want to get up and stretch?

Do you want to get up and stretch?

Are you tired of feeling?

If you want to get up then get up, the question still remains; what is the function of this poem?

(Students move around the classroom)

Who is the woman speaking in this poem, not Nikki Giovanni?
Who is the voice here that says, I wonder what it would be like to be free?

This is a hard, unpleasant, brutal poem. I want you to deal with the brutality of it, I don't want you to escape this. Not all poems cultivate